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ABSTRACT

A study of Indiana high school students sought to identify the extent of nontraditional occupational selection, awareness by the students of sex stereotyping influences, and their strategies for the promotion of educational equity. Results indicated that almost all students (80%) planned to enter occupations traditional for their sex. More females than males select nontraditional roles, with most choices also requiring, as a minimum, a four-year college degree, and they attributed class experience as the major motivating factor. Students named course experience, interests, role models, peers and relatives, economics, and work experience as the factors influencing their career choice. While students offered suggestions for counteracting sex stereotyping, their awareness was not reflected in their own choices. Recommendations resulting from the study proposed unbiased occupational information, recruitment and encouragement, with inservice staff training to facilitate better awareness and techniques, plus classroom changes permitting nontraditional work experience, sex equitable course titles and materials. (Author/LS)

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INFORMATION SERIES NO. 8
A PROJECT REPORT

Secondary Students' Views on Occupational Sex Stereotyping

Diane S. Richards
New Educational Directions, Inc.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Secondary Students' Views on Occupational Sex Stereotyping, A Project Report 1

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 3

Background and Related Studies 3
The Problem and Objectives 5

CHAPTER II: PROCEDURES 7

The Sample 7
The Interview 7
Qualitative Data Analysis 8

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS 9

The Students' Occupational Choice 9
Influences on Occupational Choice 9
Rejection of Nontraditional Occupations 13
Sex Stereotyping Influences 13
Strategies for Counteracting Sex Stereotyping . 14

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . 15

Conclusions 15
Recommendations 15

APPENDIX : Interview Guide 17

REFERENCES 18

LIST OF TABLES

1 Traditional and Nontraditional Occupational Choices 10

2 Factors that Influence Occupational Choice . . . 11

3 Nontraditional Occupations that Were Considered and Rejected 12

4 Reasons Given for Rejecting Nontraditional Occupations 12

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background and Related Studies

Sex stereotyping is a subtle and powerful lifelong force. A close look at the societal manifestations of sex stereotyping reveals how the roles and expectations of men and women are shaped. From as early as infancy, different rearing practices occur; for example, female infants usually get different toys than male infants.

In his studies, Kagen (1969) found that females are in more contact with their mothers than boys are at the age of two. Kagen also found that behavior expectations of young boys and girls are different; people encourage boys to be more aggressive, play rough and tough games, and not cry. The same study showed that young girls are assigned to chores inside the home, such as washing the dishes and cleaning the house, while boys are assigned to outside chores, such as cleaning the garage and mowing the lawn.

In a study of task responsibilities of 806 school-age children, Lynch (1975) found that traditional patterns prevail; girls do "girls' work" and boys do "boys' work." Lynch found that among children ages 9-11, females did eight minutes of household work and males did only five. At ages 12-17, females did more than twice the amount of household tasks than males.

Once children enter school and begin to read, their sex stereotyped attitudes are reinforced. Frasher and Walker (1972) found that first and second grade reading books picture girls playing quiet games more often than boys. In the same study's analysis of 734 stories, men had occupations outside the home four times as often as women, and men were employed in 58 different occupations while women were employed in only 11.

Elementary school teachers can either reinforce or contradict expectations society places on male and female children. According to findings reported by Levy (1972), schools place expectations on students which reinforce traditional behavior for girls but contradict traditional behavior for boys. Schools

reward obedience, docility, and dependence, qualities which correspond to sex-role traditions for women. However, if boys are passive, quiet, and conforming "good pupils," they are in conflict with sex-role traditions which tell them to be aggressive, active, achieving, and independent.

When children view the working world, their sex stereotyped attitudes are often reinforced; when they visit a doctor's office, the nurse is usually female and the doctor male; when they visit the grocery store, the check-out clerk is usually female and the meat cutter male; and when they ride down the street, they see men outside working on construction sites. It is not surprising that children and young adults have preconceived ideas of the occupational choices appropriate for men and women.

Brady and Brown (1973) questioned 570 eight- and ten-year-olds and found that 62 percent of the eight-year-old girls and 56 percent of the ten-year-old girls planned to be teachers, nurses, or housewives. The authors concluded that the majority of these girls had limited their occupational choices by eight years of age.

Prediger, Roth, and Noeth (1973) studied 32,000 students from 200 schools and found that, out of 25 job families, over half of the eleventh grade girls chose occupations from one of these three families: clerical and secretarial work, education and social services, and nursing and human care. In the same study, only 7 percent of the eleventh grade boys chose occupations from these three job families; instead almost half of the boys chose occupations in the technologies and trade job families. The study showed that both boys and girls limited their occupational choices to job families traditional for their sex.

Stereotyped occupational choices are further reinforced and supported in the high school setting. High school textbooks, course names, and inadvertent comments made by teachers, counselors, and administrators reinforce sex-role stereotyping. In guidance materials, occupational titles such as "draftsman," "stewardess," and "policeman" seem to limit occupations that are within the abilities and interests of both men and women. Career guidance materials were examined by Vetter (1974) for the purpose of determining the degree of sex bias they contained. It was found that many such materials categorize jobs as "male" or "female," use one-sex illustrations, and present sex-based norms.

Birk (1974) examined over 2,000 illustrations in popular sources of career information such as the *Occupational Handbook*, the *Encyclopedia of Careers*, and the *SRA Occupational*

Briefs. This study found that these sources pictured fewer women than men; the women that the sources did picture were shown representing service occupations, were smiling while men appeared to be seriously at work, and were almost never shown working outdoors.

When they guide students' career exploration, counselors often use interest inventories and manuals that present sex stereotyped material. Schlossberg and Goodman (1972) gave both male and female forms of the Strong Vocational Interest Blanks to 10 men and 28 women. Nine of the women scored high on the occupation of psychiatrist and ten of the women scored high in advertising, but neither occupation was available on the women's form. Seven of the men scored high on guidance counselor, six scored high on recreation leader, and five scored high on speech pathologist, yet none of these occupations were on the men's form.

There are recent changes in these patterns because of awareness created by the women's liberation movement and the Equal Rights Amendment and because of legislation in the 1972 Education Amendments, Titles II and IX, which mandates nondiscrimination on the basis of sex. A study by Flanagan (1972) found shifts in occupational choices by both eleventh grade boys and by eleventh grade girls from 1960 to 1970. He found that girls' choose less exclusively the traditional female jobs of nurse, secretary, office worker, typist, beautician, and housewife and choose more often such careers as biological scientist, lawyer, mathematician, political scientist, economist, social worker, sociologist, psychologist, artist, entertainer, and writer.

The Strong Vocational Interest Blank, which had separate male and female forms, is now the Unisex Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, which combines all occupations in one form and eliminates sexist items and terms. It does, however, still attach male and female labels to occupational groupings, which show the sex of the norm groups and not the sex preferred for the occupation. Other interest inventories are also being revised to eliminate sex-role stereotyping. Many publishing companies are providing guidelines for authors in an effort to eliminate sex stereotyping. The media is starting to bring this issue to the public's eye, and school practices are changing to allow young men and women equal opportunities.

The Problem and Objectives

With this increase in attention to sex-role stereotyping, it is not clear what young people think or whether they have

been influenced by these changes. This study by New Educational Directions (NED), set out to discover whether or not sex is a factor that still shapes young people's occupational choices. It tried to find out if youths are aware of the environmental influences which inhibit equity and what strategies youths would offer to promote educational equity.

The objectives of the NED study were to:

1. Identify the degree to which Indiana high school juniors and seniors consider choosing occupations that are typical or atypical of the occupations that their sex has traditionally chosen.

2. Investigate and document what juniors and seniors in Indiana perceive to be the sex stereotyping influences that affect their lives.

3. Gather suggestions from juniors and seniors in Indiana for ways to counteract sex stereotyping as it influences occupational choices.

CHAPTER II

Procedures

The original project plans were to administer the Ohio Vocational Interest Survey (OVIS) as a screening device to a sample of high school students in representative school districts statewide. Pilot tests showed that OVIS was an inadequate instrument for the purposes of this study. In its place, NED decided to use a group interview procedure.

The Sample

The six Indiana high schools that agreed to cooperate in this study were located in the northern, central, and southern portions of the state and served both urban and rural populations. The project chose to interview eleventh and twelfth grade students because they would soon be faced with occupational decisions. NED staff and school personnel randomly selected participants; the sample represented varying ability levels, community types, and programs, and included 128 juniors and seniors, of which there were 59 males and 69 females.

The Interview

In planning for the data-collecting interviews, NED developed and tested an interview guide that would focus discussion on three major concerns:

1. The extent to which sex stereotyping influenced these juniors' and seniors' occupational decisions;
2. What these students perceived to be the sex stereotyping influences that have affected them; and
3. Suggestions for counteracting sex stereotyping as it influences occupational choices (see appendix).

Three local seniors participated in a test interview, evaluated the questions, and helped determine that students should be interviewed in groups of three to five with two interviewers present.

One interviewer conducted the session while the other recorded responses, asked clarifying questions, and, at the end of the session, reviewed data collected. All interview sessions were tape recorded with the consent of the groups.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Following each interview session, the NED staff recorded the response to each question on a data sheet for each student and verified it by listening to the taped session. The synthesized data from these individual sheets is reported in the findings.

When analyzing the responses, NED listed as "traditional" all occupations that are typically entered by one or both sexes; for example, nursing (female), construction worker (male), and writer (both male and female). NED listed as "nontraditional" all occupations chosen by a student that are not typically entered by that student's sex, provided that s/he aspired to the full responsibilities of the job; for example, if a young woman planned to enter police work but wanted a desk job, her choice would be considered traditional.

CHAPTER III

Findings

The Students' Occupational Choices

Of the 128 students interviewed, 102 (80 percent) planned to enter a traditional occupation, 17 (13 percent) planned to enter nontraditional occupations and 9 (7 percent) were undecided about their choice (see Table 1). There were 69 females, of which 48 (70 percent) chose traditional and 16 (23 percent) chose nontraditional fields. Among the 59 male students, 54 (92 percent) chose traditional fields and only 1 (less than 2 percent) chose a nontraditional field. The majority of nontraditional occupations chosen were careers requiring at least a college degree.

Influences on Occupational Choice

These five factors emerged as primary influences on their career plans, whether students were directing themselves toward traditional or nontraditional careers (see Table 2):

1. *Experiences*. These include courses taken, especially in grades 11 and 12 and work experiences, in summer jobs, part-time work, and/or formal work experience programs. Course experiences were stated most often as an influential factor in choosing a career (40 percent); combined with work experience, it accounted for 44 percent of students' responses.

2. *Interests*. These include personal interests that the students think relate to the occupations they choose; for example, if they like being in the woods, they choose to be forest rangers or, if they wish to travel, they become flight attendants. Personal interests influenced 22 percent of the students.

3. *Role models*. These include parents, siblings, other relatives, and/or older friends that students choose to imitate. Role models influenced 19 percent of the students.

TABLE 1: TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONAL CHOICES

Female choices	*Number of students n=69*
Traditional choices:[a]	
Actress/singer	1
Babysitter	1
Bank teller	1
Beautician	4
Bookkeeper/accountant	2
Commercial seamstress	1
Computer processor	2
Floral designer	2
Food service worker	1
Housekeeper	1
Interior designer	1
Medical assistant	13
Photographer	2
Psychology major	1
Salesperson	1
Secretary	6
Social worker	1
Stewardess	1
Teacher	6
TOTAL ... *70%*	48
Nontraditional choices:[b]	
Biologist	2
Business professional	3
Horticulture/agriculture major	1
Law enforcer	4
Math major	2
Pharmacist	2
Psychiatrist	1
Theater set builder	1
TOTAL ... *23%*	16

NOTE: Nine (7 percent) of the students were undecided about their occupational choices.

[a] Traditional choices *n*=102 *80%*
[b] Nontraditional choices *n*=17 *13%*

Male choices	*Number of students n=59*
Traditional choices:[a]	
Accountant	3
Artist	5
Auto body repairer	2
Bartender	1
Bricklayer	1
Business professional	4
Carpet layer	1
Chef	1
Construction laborer	2
Draftsperson	1
Electronics major	2
Engine repairer	1
Engineer	2
Farm/factory laborer	1
Football player	1
Foreign language	2
Forest ranger	1
Heating/air conditioning businessperson	1
Insurance salesperson	1
Lawyer	2
Music director	1
Photographer	1
Pilot	1
Plumber	1
Pre-dental/pre-medical major	2
Printer	1
Psychologist	2
Recreation director	1
Science major	2
Storekeeper	1
Television producer	1
Welder	3
Writer	2
TOTAL ... *92%*	54
Nontraditional choices:[b]	
Nurse	1
TOTAL ... *2%*	1

4. *Peers and/or relatives*. These include words or actions that students interpret as praise or rejection of occupations in which they express tentative interest. Peers and/or relatives influenced 9 percent of the students.

5. *Economics*. These include such considerations as the maximum earning potential of an occupation within the limits of the training one is willing to obtain. It is important here to note that economic factors frequently precluded a male student's interest in a traditionally female occupation, since the latter tend to be lower paying for any given skill level. Economic factors influenced 6 percent of the students interviewed.

The second part of Table 2 shows the three factors that influenced those students who chose nontraditional careers; however, note that only 17 students are included in this sample.

TABLE 2: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE

Factors	*Number of students*	*Percent*
Traditional and nontraditional choices:		
Experience in courses	47	40
Interests	26	22
Role models	23	19
Peers and relatives	11	9
Economics	7	6
Work experience	5	4
TOTAL	119	100
Nontraditional choices only:		
Experience in courses	10	59
Role models	4	24
Interests	3	17
TOTAL	17	100

TABLE 3: NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS THAT WERE CONSIDERED AND REJECTED
(n=35)

FEMALE CHOICES				*MALE CHOICES*	
	Number of students		*Number of students*		*Number of students*
Computer programmer	1	Lawyer	3	Cosmetologist	2
Construction worker	1	Mechanic	2	Interior decorator	1
Dentist	2	Pharmacist	1	Nurse	1
Doctor	4	Police officer	2	Physical therapist	1
Electronic engineer	1	Psychiatrist	1	Receptionist	1
Factory worker	2	Racer	1		
Forest ranger	1	Truck driver	2		
Jockey	1	Veterinarian	2		
		Welder	2		
TOTAL	83%		29	TOTAL 12%	6

TABLE 4: REASONS GIVEN FOR REJECTING NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS

Reason (n=41)	*Number of males*	*Number of females*	*Total*
Preferred chosen field over this one	2	7	9
The nontraditional occupation requires too much work	0	7	7
Parental influence	2	5	7
Not compatible with the role wife and mother	0	2	2
Teacher influence (in related subject area)	1	1	2
Too embarrassed to pursue the occupation	1	0	1
Did not have enough information regarding the field	3	3	6
	9	25	34

NOTE: Five students had not totally rejected this choice; two had considered and rejected the nontraditional occupation when very young; some gave more than one reason, others gave none.

Rejection of Nontraditional Occupations

Of those 102 students who chose a traditional occupation, 35 (34 percent) said they had considered a nontraditional occupation at one time and rejected it (see Table 3). There were 29 females (83 percent) and 6 males (17 percent) in this group.

The 41 reasons 35 students gave for rejecting a considered nontraditional vocation are summarized in Table 4; note that the sample size is small and the responses too widespread for close analysis.

Many of the students said that it is more acceptable for females than males to choose a nontraditional career because males feel that they need to preserve their masculinity and because traditional female occupations typically pay less than male occupations. Many students said they considered taking a nontraditional course in junior or senior high school, but decided against enrolling because they did not want to be the only male or female in the class, they did not have enough time in their schedules, and/or they were discouraged by their parents or school personnel.

Sex Stereotyping Influences

The major influences that the interviewed students perceived as contributing to the development and maintenance of stereotypical thinking about sex roles were:

1. *Tradition*. This was expressed through such statements as, "That's the way its always been."
2. *Differing expectations*. Students said that parents, peers, and society expect different things from males and females. For example, boys are rough, tough, and don't cry; while girls are sweet, gentle, and cry. These expectations are reinforced in their daily lives through toys, games, books, and television.
3. *School-related experiences*. These include teacher attitudes and the courses that are available primarily on the basis of sex.
4. *Role models*. These include models established by parents, home training, and the general environment. The models to whom students are regularly exposed at school include female elementary teachers, male principals, female school crossing guards, and male school custodians, of which all reinforce sex-role stereotyping for students during their formative years.

Throughout the interviews, students repeatedly said "things are changing" relative to sex-role stereotyping in their everyday lives. They point to the women's rights movement and the controversy concerning the Equal Rights Amendment as major forces in creating awareness.

When asked to identify the age at which sex stereotyping has its greatest influences, 96 students responded; 34 percent said that the greatest influence is between birth and age five, 33 percent said it occurs in grade school, 13 percent said it is greatest in junior high, and 18 percent said high school. The remaining 2 percent said it is a lifelong process.

Strategies for Counteracting Sex Stereotyping

During each interview session, NED interviewers gathered student suggestions for facilitating the process of attaining sex equity. Many students explained that the process of establishing sex equity will take time and must be started at a very young age. In order to accomplish this goal, students thought that parents' and employers' attitudes must be changed and the media's promotion of sex stereotyping must be halted. Students' suggestions most frequently included the following strategies:

1. Students of both sexes should be given information about both traditional and nontraditional occupations by means of films, brochures, and counselor contacts.
2. Students should be exposed to nontraditional role models in school by such means as films, fieldtrips, guest speakers, and counselor-scheduled interviews.
3. Those students who are considering nontraditional occupations should be supported and encouraged by their teachers and counselors.
4. All classes at all grade levels should be open to both sexes.
5. In the classroom, teacher expectations and treatment of students should be the same for both sexes.
6. Sex stereotypical attitudes of administrators, counselors, and teachers must be changed by means of awareness and training activities.
7. Course materials and career information need to be revised so that these do not promote sex stereotyping.
8. Classroom climate and course names should be revised to assure that they do not encourage sex stereotyping.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

On the basis of this project's findings, NED concludes that the students in this sample possess an awareness and understanding of those environmental influences which promote sex stereotyping. However, in most cases this awareness is not reflected in the occupations presently chosen by the majority of these students. The following conclusions are made about the students who have chosen to enter nontraditional occupations:

1. More females than males are choosing nontraditional occupations.
2. The large majority of nontraditional choices require at least a four-year college degree.
3. The most influential factor resulting in a nontraditional occupational choice is the student's experience in his/her classes.

Recommendations

The study supports the need to initiate changes that will bring about educational equity for male and female students. Those who were interviewed made some suggestions for change. With the study's data and these student suggestions in mind, NED makes the following recommendations to school administrators, teachers, and counselors.

Career Guidance

1. *INFORMATION.* Give nonbiased information about all occupations to students of both sexes.

   Some new nonbiased promotional and career guidance materials are available. Vocational guidance materials should outline the abilities required for specific jobs and should not limit jobs to one sex.

2. *RECRUITMENT*. Recruit students to courses that are nontraditional to their sex.

   All classes at all grade levels should be open to both sexes.

3. *ENCOURAGEMENT*. Support students who choose to enter nontraditional vocational programs or occupations.

   In their personal contacts with students, counselors, teachers, and administrators can easily discourage or encourage such decisions.

Inservice Training

4. *AWARENESS*. Train counselors, teachers, and administrators to identify attitudes and practices that nurture sex bias.

5. *TECHNIQUES*. Train them to use effective strategies that promote educational sex equity.

Classroom Practices and Materials

6. *COURSE OFFERINGS*. Provide classes in which students experience work that is nontraditional to their sex.

   This is especially important in view of this study's finding that class experiences have the greatest influence on students' occupational choices.

7. *COURSE TITLES*. Ensure that course titles promote sex equity.

   Change titles that have been traditionally linked with one sex.

8. *CLASSROOM MATERIALS*. Replace materials that promote sex bias.

   It is important that school personnel learn to identify these materials. If budgets do not allow them to be replaced, teachers should openly discuss with students the influence their materials have on them.

[*EDITOR'S NOTE:* To help vocational educators and counselors implement these recommendations, an annotated guide to sex equity resources follows this report (p. 19). Whenever possible, the guide includes sources from which materials are available.]

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following is a list of questions that interviewer's asked students. Questions 5 and 6 were later deleted in the interviews because they did not yield useable information.

1. Give name and occupational choice.

2. Give reasons for above choice.

3. Give ideas and examples from your personal experiences of where and how sex stereotyping is or has been nurtured.

4. At what age did sex stereotyping have the greatest influence on you?

[5. Do you see these experiences influencing your career goals?]

[6. When did you first notice that you had a choice?]

7. Did you ever consider a nontraditional occupation? What? Why did you reject this career?

8. Many students who have the ability and desire to go into a nontraditional occupation reject this choice because of the influences of sex stereotyping. Can you offer any suggestions which would help students feel more comfortable in choosing nontradtional occupations?

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